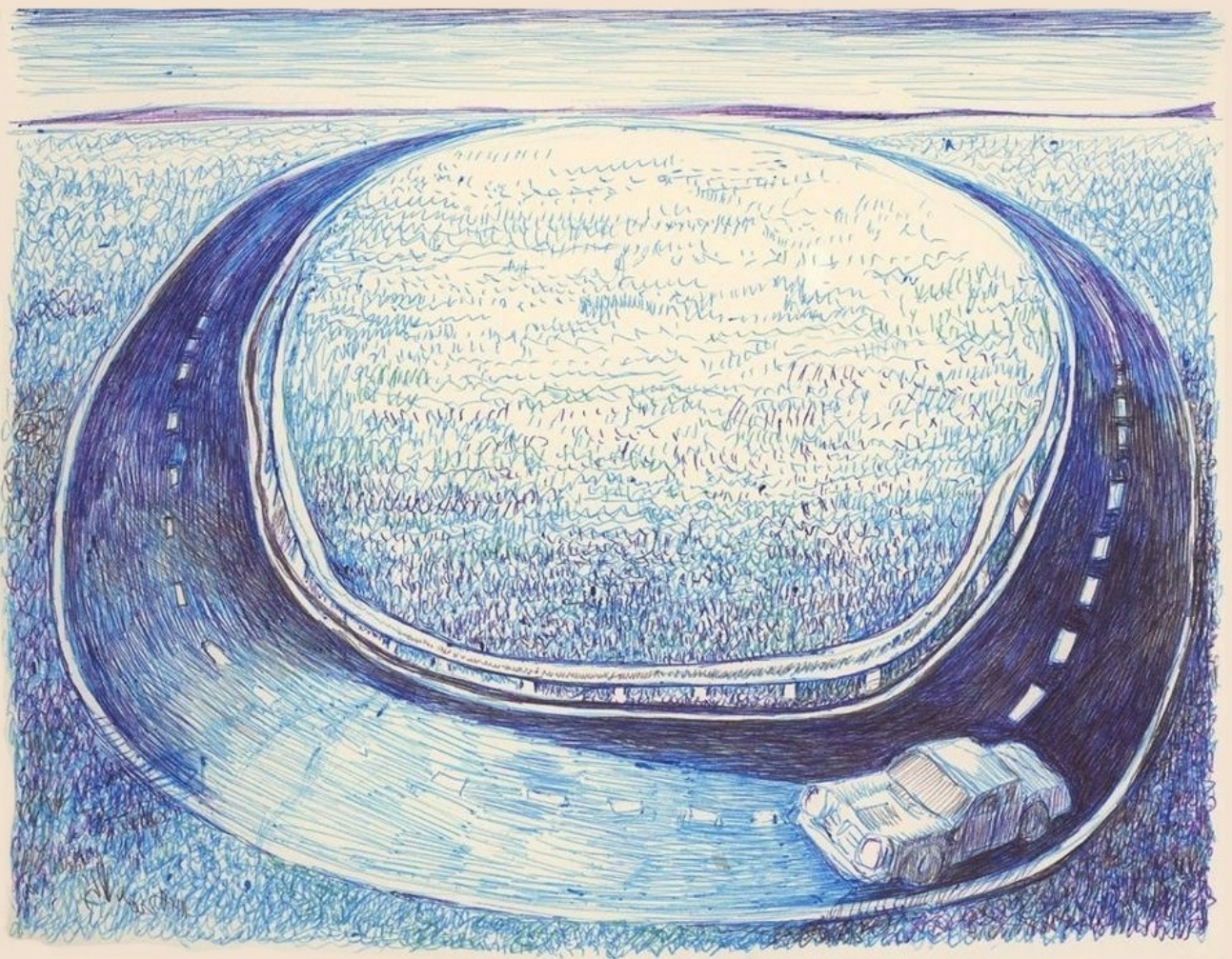


FEARLESS



cover art & illustrations: gregory kh bryant

a cage in the forest

tell the blind man there's
nothing to see

let the politicians
fuck your daughters

don't settle for the facts when
the truth is what really matters

don't worry about man ray
dead now for 30 years in
paris, but i still keep waiting
for his call

i stand on the edge of the
porch roof, next to the
hole in my house where the
light pours out

look

the days are shorter now
and all of my fears that much
closer to the surface

no amount of poetry will
ever cure cancer

no man who would ask for
your vote would
ever give you his in return

these are things to think about
while you watch dorothea
undress, and when she asks if
you love her, you should smile
without answering

you should kiss her breasts

words aren't the enemy,
of course, but it's always
best to act as if they are

john sweet

in your normal tone of voice.

BLUE IN THE FACE

announce

FREE MILK MONEY

GET BACK ON A BIKE

We also have jets,

REPRESENT

I represent the infirm.
My powers fizzle out.
The cold weather stings.
I expect to fall flat.
I break my fall by breaking
my face. I will be unable
to see. Only an ant can
understand me. I am so
low some of my best friends
are ants. I make reservations
to places that turn me away.
I run out of breath after
taking one step. I can barely
take care of my own self.
I stand alone because no one
understands me. Even the
ants have betrayed me.
I am not upset about it.
Life is like business. I should
be representing just myself.

A STORY

No, I would not fall asleep.
Tell me a story. It would
do me good. A story
about the moon man and

how it sings to the stars,
that would move my heart. Tell it.
How your mouth trembles as you
choose each word carefully.

Your passion shines through. I have
been waiting for a story
that will move my heart again.
I want to be through with tears.

TRACK THE SUN

Track the sun.
That is your star.
Depending
on where you are
it is daytime.
Depending
on where you are
it is nighttime.

Insomnia
sets in as
the sun sets
at last.

Stare into
the sun too long
and your eyesight
will be gone.

Follow your star
with open eyes
with sunglasses on.

Your sensitive
eyes need much
protection
just like your
sensitive heart.

Follow your star.
Follow your heart.
Follow the sun,
not oblivion.

a song of light & hope & optimism

no answers

no answers

this is the only important thing to
remember while you devour
your children

spring
and then summer and
then fall

the death of your father and
then all of his poet friends and
good riddance

no reason to go to the
top of burnt hill road but
here you are

blinding white sun and
the faint memory of heat

a silence constructed from
small sounds that
never quite register

a civilization built on
genocide and ignorance
and so move past it

drown your lovers

assassinate the politicians

there is no end to the
darker futures
just waiting to be born

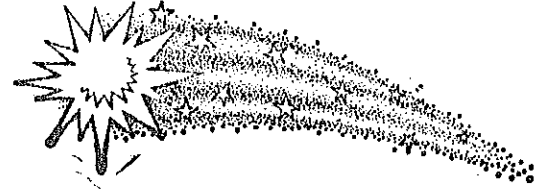
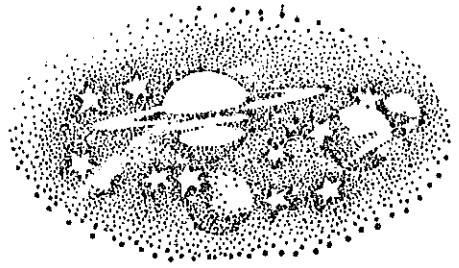
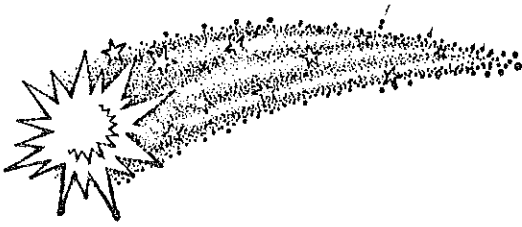
john sweet

POEMS by
Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal



Buddy

He used to take me to pick lilacs in the spring...
 A "man's man" at all times and contractor by trade,
 he built his life with dry wall and stainless steel tools.
 Those calluses of his kept a roof over our head
 and food on our handed down china.
 Our household may have seen some lean times
 but we weren't the type to complain.



How loud the rock music would play,
 when we had company over
 to enjoy a cold beer and warm conversation.

Over thirty years later – it is now late spring
 and those purple trees bring back childhood memories of our walks.
 They lose their scent as I walk closer to your hospital bed.
 I hold your hand for the first time as an adult.
 But the oxygen machine, the morphine, the pain –
 prevents us from talking.



So we communicate in gestures, gentle gazes and telepathy instead,
 as those transparent nurses pass us by.
 It is only us now – my stepfather and I –
 who was more of a father than my biological one,
 since he took the time to raise me.



In two weeks time – I find myself kneeling at your coffin.
 People keep telling me to say goodbye
 but I don't want to.
 Instead I say, "I'll see you later."
 That seems much more accurate to me.

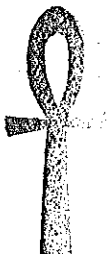
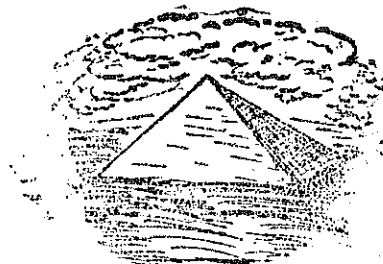


I relinquish those images of what cancer has done to you.
 I do this out of respect,
 knowing that is not how you want to be remembered.
 I play some Johnny Cash, some hard rock, some southern rock
 and crack open another cold beer to recall our warm conversations.

~Dedicated to Leonard Norys~



Dylā K. Ravyn



no reprieve

during fights beneath
my boyhood roof
the turntable more
often than not
got knocked over
a record always rolling
across the floor
& crashing into a wall
then later when things
seemed on the mend
the needle would skid
across wounded grooves
a terrible tearing sound
part of the music dying too

the meeting point

i meet my monsters
at the machine
& jab the keys
my every line
a boxcutter slashing
the ugly bastards
they clutch
their windpipes
w/ bloody claws
their bullshit hissing
silent at last

rubble, rubble, motherfucker

i mumbled for a good part of my life
even in high school they called me
the hamburglar—that bungling
masked mcdonaldland mascot
whose unintelligent mutterings
amounted to “rubble, rubble”
it probably had to do w/ my father
& growing up around all that screaming
& knuckles & busted walls & furniture, etc
i suppose mumbling was at least something
compared to the silent retreat
i had taken up beneath that bloody roof
but still most of what came out
of the branches of my lungs was cigarette smoke
quiet & gray curling past my eyebrow
& “rubble, rubble” of course
then one day i discovered poetry
& i screamed in black ink as i punched
the typewriter in my little cloud of smoke
the tiers of keys had mouths louder
than anybody that i had ever heard
louder than my ogre father
& i continued to squeeze screams
out of the ABC's
& there was blood but it was beautiful
& that's how i cured myself of
my motherfucking mumbling

poems
by
rob
plath

FUGUE FIVE: SICKNESS (The Universe)

by

C.F. Roberts

I'm sick....if you have the misfortune of seeing me I look like some sad cartoon bug or something. I haven't bathed in the better part of a week, I'm in constant pain, I can't eat and I really am truly the sickest I've been in decades.

The little black cat is curled up in a ball by my side----she won't leave. She rests half on my body, half off, because it hurts so much when she's on top of me that I won't stop moaning and groaning.

What's she thinking? Is she afraid I'm going to die? I'm loathe to say what my cat is thinking, but I guess I appreciate the good thoughts.

On this one fortuitous night, H. has granted the cat a break. The cat is actually out and I can only imagine she'll be back. She's tenacious in her role as healer/guardian or whatever it is she perceives her role to be.

H., I realize, coming out of another distressed fever dream, is clinging to me hard....am I scaring her in the same way I'm scaring the cat with my illness?

The dreams, if that's what they are, have been insane, relentless and exhausting....I'm not sure how much of my "sleep" has actually been sleep. I spent much of the nebulous hours faced with a wall of "PLAY" icons in front of my face and I must step into all these instances of video and edit them to given specifications. I am working under deadline, so there's always a great sense of urgency to this irrational muddle of thought and hallucination. It is not passive, it is not restful.

The video purgatory fades to nothing in this moment between freakouts and H. and I are floating together in a kind of polluted stygian black...we are lost in the darkness but its okay because we, in essence, are the darkness. All pain and fear are gone...the confusion remains but it's all good as confusion is sex and lust and I'm consumed with a ferocious, infernal hunger....we nestle tight in each other's bodies and the voracious feeling grows...I kiss her desperately for fear of losing all of this and she reciprocates---I'm lost in the fever, I clutch a breast and by way of response she does a quarter turn and tightens her burning legs around me. I hear her chuckle and then the entire universe does flip-flops...I can't tell where she starts and I end, anymore....we are our own rogue galaxy, stars and planets erupting into life and then dying inside us as we tumble through the limitless void---I think of how Gaia first met Chaos and we are that. Alpha, Omega and alla that cascading into itself forever.

Reality of flesh and chair

Patterns of organic energy on a sub-atomic level

not ruled by cause and effect-

by looking we change the outcome.

Change is inherent in observing. The closer

we look the less precise we become.

Light bumps against flesh, moves backward

to mark where flesh was.

I try to define the reality of flesh and chairs,

become distracted by the buzz and bounce.

Newtonian physics. Einstein's theories on relativity.

The more we try to comprehend the less they have meaning.

The theory of everything implies that we don't exist.

The chair is new today but the wood is ancient.

Light bounces from tree to retina and I say chair,

but chair is nothing more than an artificial construct,

an approximation of a limited mind's effort to name a reality

seeming to exist. Our orbits exceed experience of finite flesh.

By merely looking I have changed chair.

A non-existent mover makes me think tree.

I am lost in a forest of holes that leads me nowhere.

Out of nothing, everything.

Out of dying flesh, I find never ending,

the most vast nothing,



driftwood

the glowing amber
driftwood
of imagination

cascading
the red river highway
to the silvery heart

like salt contracting
after expansion

solar fires torn to shreds

when frost hungry bells
begin to chime

irissollie (c)



free of who I was.

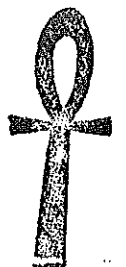
Free of flesh.

Free of table.

Free of chair.

Free of words

donna snyder



Dropping Like Flies

by Wm. Andrew Turman on Thursday, January 5, 2012 at 3:44am ·

I have been accused
of being an emotional vampire
and, lately, even worse.
So I watch
as the rats
desert ship.
I write
in gonzo style
reporting my life's events.
But linger too long
in the mixed state
(all the joy and irritation of a mania,
combined with suicidal ideation)
and friends disappear.
I have no control
on how long my moods will last.
I do my best
utilizing the resources at hand.
Writing and painting
are outlets for me.
Without them
I would harm myself.
Being chastised
for what keeps me alive,
is confounding.
So I have fewer friends
so be it.
Those in the know
those who really care
will allow me to ride it out.
Those who disappear
when I get tough
on myself and beat
myself up, or cut...
Well, I wish them luck
in finding lives
free from suffering.

Zen Insight #9 Constant Craving

In the early hours
it is easy to be
pious and devout
I like to be alone
with my burning thoughts.

I smoke
in the garage
or on deck
electricity shooting
from my fingertips.

Fresh from the hospital
reading the journal
I wrote in before
I left my wife, my life.

Mainly a listing
of paintings waiting
to be done,
but she is quoted, noticing
"the Culture of Crazyiness"
that I lived in at the time.

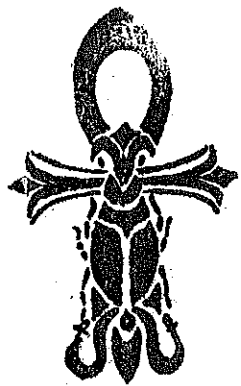
I am trying to figure out
what has changed
what I have learned
since that turbulent time.

My life is much simpler now
I get laid as much as I did then
I keep the same hours
I do my best to take care of my folks.

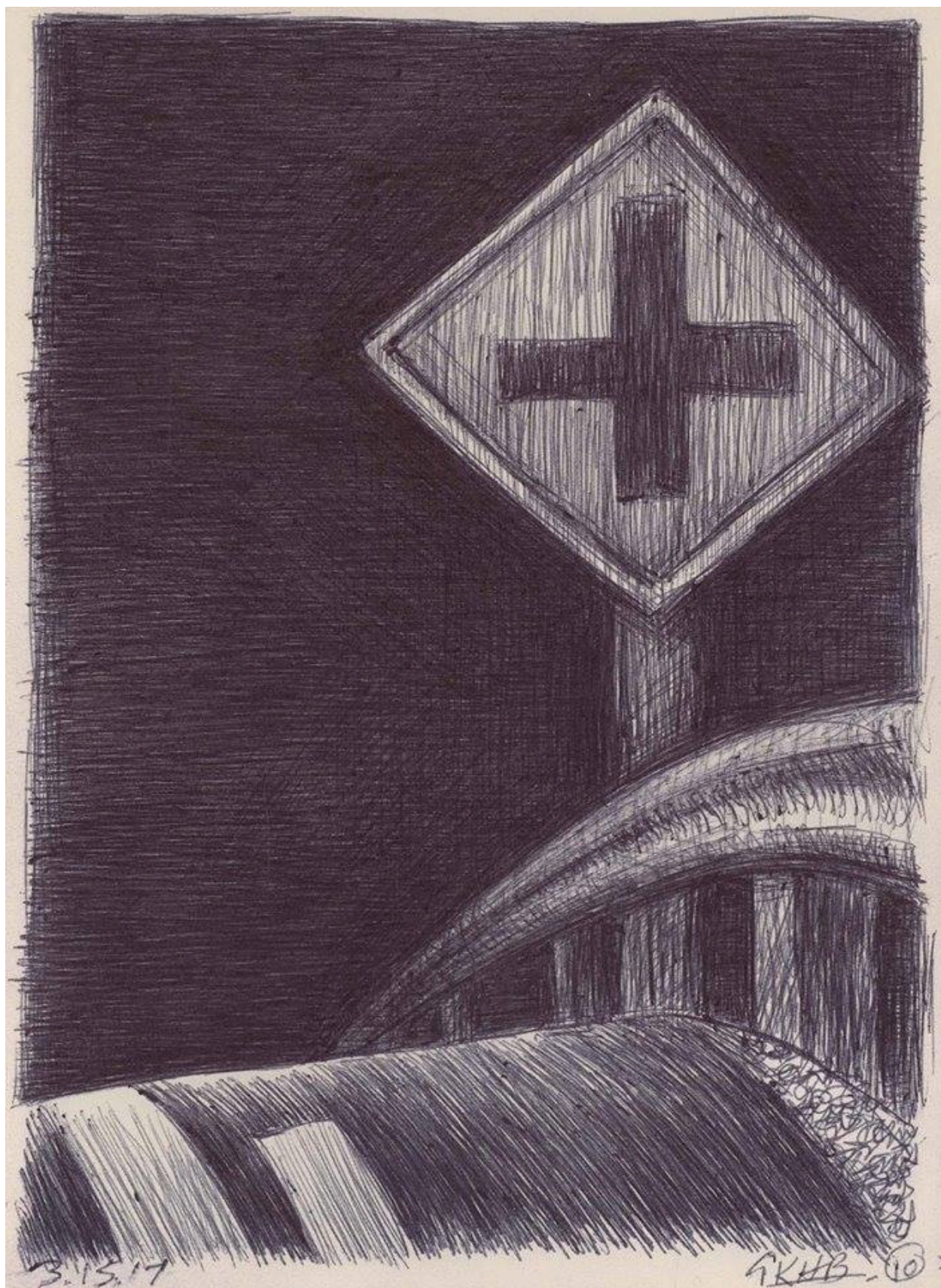
The embers of desire
still smoldering, but
as we all are
dying.

I wish to spend time
with someone
who is not another's.

andrew turman







loved you once

you wanted to marry me but
we were just kids.

we had big fun w/only our
imaginations to fuel us.

i became ill at sixteen.

you sent what seemed to be
a heartfelt letter.

i replied w/some of my poems.

i never heard from you again.

you sought then married money.

i'm told you have acquired a lovely
staff to tackle all of those bothersome
domestic chores.

you've had children i'll never see except in
the glossy christmas cards you still
send to my parents.

i continue to write poetry.

i live paycheck to paycheck from a 9-5

job you'd consider common but i
consider tolerable.

you and your ilk probably thought it
safer to simply ignore me.

i wouldn't want to know you now.

- kevin m. hibshman

opportunities

have they really stopped knocking or
have i just stopped answering?

- kevin m. hibshman

mauled by

A Realistic Robot

Could a line be drawn from

historians

TEAM EFFORT

**AND
WHAT WE WERE
FIGHTING FOR.**

My friends all hate

Strange Meandering

Doesn't everyone?

Be Sensible about the

Inescapable Crisis

Night Murmurs

I wanted to talk
to my dark-eyed cousin
but her mind had already gone
where her mother's had
so many years before.
I wanted to ask what treats
my father bought us
on those Kershaw pool trips,
the name of the man
my own mother had loved
so desperately before my father.
If anyone left
in my life would know,
she would,
but my question,
this strange insatiable
curiosity over faint
memories came too late,
so I fell asleep
and in my dream
became my mother,
fingers still bare of
the stolen rings my father
had given her, the last thing
she could touch that he
had touched. She, too,
was searching for answers,
holding strong, chin held high,
until the girders all
gave way and she bent
over sobbing as the beast
of all that has been lost
and yet to be lost
howled from within her.

pris campbell



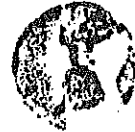
Martin Luther King: MIA

We're looking for you, Martin.
We're searching Selma,
back-row bus seats,
crowded lunch counters,
Dylan's guitar,
Hoover's files,
your I Have A Dream speech.
We're combing back through days
when protest and love
beat in the same heart chamber;
days when we thought black
would meet white
and white would meet black
in a role reversal melt
down of ivory keys played
on a Sunday organ in churches
pouring Christ's blood
into silver chalices
for whoSOEVER believed.

Show yourself, Martin.
Do you sit, unseen,
in laps of the homeless,
the disenfranchised,
beaten and raped women,
molested children
and sad, jobless men,
telling them love
can still rule the world
and no hand will then ever be raised
with gun, chain or fist to innocent backs?

We need you, Martin.
Take up your staff.
Strap on your sandals.
Lead us from temptation
and forward into a salvation
of arms outreached in an endless ballet
where princes remain faithful
and trapped swans are set free
by long journey's end.

pris campbell



BOOK

Reviews by kevin m. hibshman

Daniel Crocker, Leadwood: New and Selected Poems
1998 - 2018, Stubborn Mule Press, 2018.

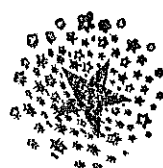
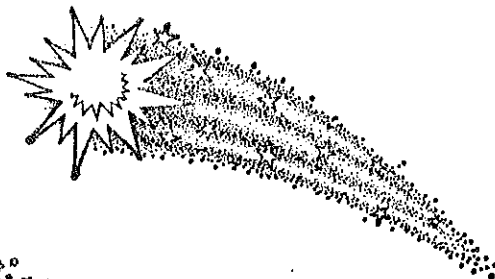
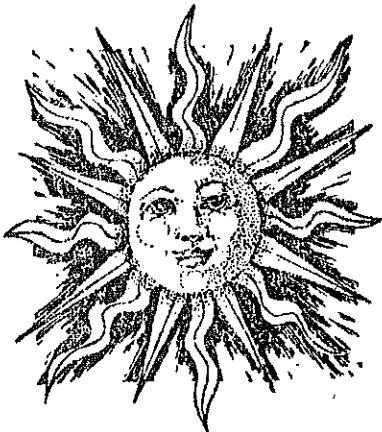
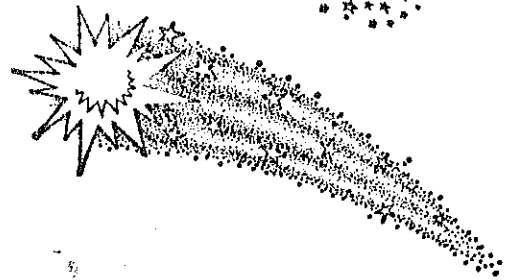
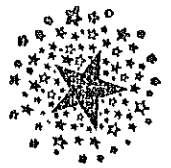
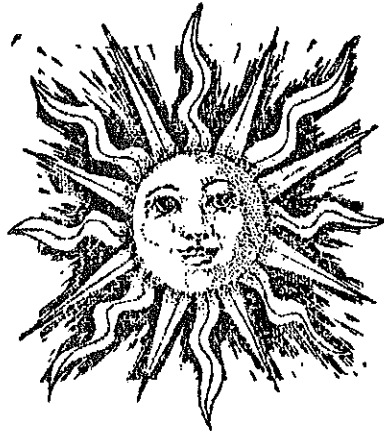
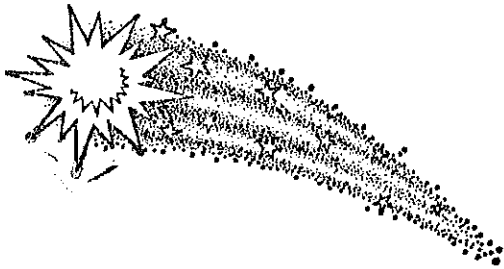
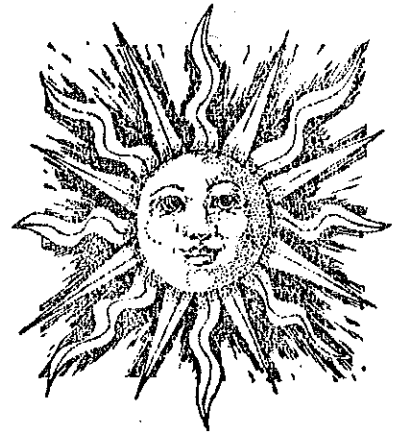
I have always found Crocker a thrilling poet to read. I know his writing will do something to my mind, my heart as it taps into what makes me most human. We all need to remember from time to time that life happens while we are busy surviving it. Poverty, the loss of loved ones, intelligence met with indifference and, of course, just feeling different, are all things most poets endure and utilize as inspiration. Poetry is the best therapy I could recommend. Crocker lays it all out for you: the loss the despair, the confusion in poetry that stuns with its bold candor and uplifts with its sense of hard-won beauty. A poetry book that is a true 'page-turner'. I was sad when I got to the end as it was akin to crashing hard on a favorite drug.

Rob Plath, Feed These Words To The Buddha Who Is Slowly Waking Up Inside Of You, Cyberwit.net, 2018.

A seasoned and prolific poet, Plath knows how to turn pain into art. His plethora of inner demons provides the acidic inspiration, caustic wit, and jagged confessions that fuel his dark visions. He doesn't weaken these demons by giving them specific names but the attentive reader will pick up on some clever intimations he throws like knives. Is it by observing others' pain we learn better how to cope with our own? If so, it is strangely comforting that Plath has enough pain to keep him writing for quite some time.

Nancy Davenport, Smoking In Mom's Garage, Red
Alice Books, 2018.

As you view her photo on the cover of this
Wonderful book, you instantly realize this
Woman has lived, seen things and above all,
survived intact to write about it all. I, for one,
am very glad she did. The book, at first reading,
for me was like slipping into a warm bath - both
sensual and soothing. It became much more and
I am reminded of some of my favorite women
poets: Diane di Prima, Anne Waldman, Joanne
Kyger and now, Nancy Davenport.



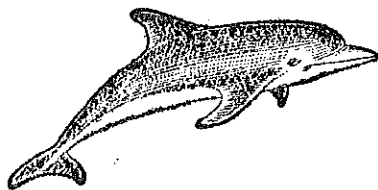
Cairn

Dd. Spungin

A pile of stones
Intransigent marketplace
Our witching hour
The raven's cause
Impromptu pause
for traffic, slowing
Lovers growing taller
in the shadow of a yesterday
gone south

Mouth to mouth--
this resuscitation,
a matter of course,
a matter of fact
In the matter of he and she,
in the manner of Romeo and me
We trip over our own vows
thinking of intentions,
pleading the case of why

The clementine sun
bars our way
to darkness
All is calm
All is brighter today
We have this moment
Dive in, chew it up
Don't mess with the scenery.



Running On Empty

Dd. Spungin

Running on empty, this gasoline edges us out
We had it all last year

Remembering costs more than my pocket holds
and I wonder how to make payment

Water runs around the bend as time
trickles into barrels of long ago

There, yearning for yesterday, you stand
holding empty hands out to the sky

I call and you smile, but you don't hear me
You turn and I run on empty.

Plastic Rain

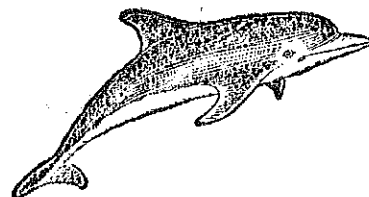
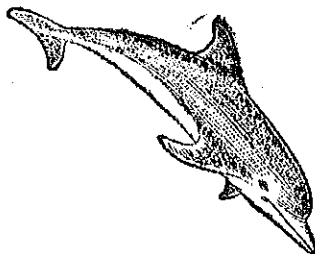
Dd. Spungin

Mannequins wink
Pull of fashion
Too strong for the downtrodden

Penny in a pocket
Drops to the floor
Holes, the way out

Beggar retrieves
Saves it for a rainy day
I buy an umbrella

Charge the cost on a card
Already weighted down
By dreams



FUGUE SIX: ELSEWHERE

by C.F. Roberts

He spends entirely too much time preening in front of the mirror in the jack and jill bathroom. Outside she calls for him; She's getting impatient and understandably so.

Admiring his well-defined pecks and his long, lean penis in the reflection he feels like a young lion who's assumed control of the pride, usurped the power of the old beast and now the bounty is his for the taking. He would seem to have one up on the world.

Today he has married his cousin in accordance with the religion they created together as children. Bald faced and proud to the universe they have announced their union to a joyous cosmos of three, including a friend, disciple and officiator, a pet tortoise and a favorite houseplant. He believes that counts as three. He was never very good at math. From such gossamer things are dynasties created, he supposes.

His bride, partner and best friend calls to him from the suite with mild annoyance in her voice. She has conceded to be his bride for a small price, that he would get a vasectomy, and this he has granted her. He supposes they can adopt if they feel moved to at some point. Until then, he can fuck her bareback forever.

He marvels on the similarities he shares with her. One might know they are cousins if they see them side by side---the truth is they could be twins. Same build. Same skin tone. Color and length of hair the same. Same facial features. It turns him on. They might almost be the same person.

They are the beginning of a new era, he thinks---the flashpoint, maybe, of a climb up the evolutionary ladder.

Again, from behind the door, she calls him. He finally relinquishes the moment to step out into the main room. Tiki décor adorns the suite and it's all bathed in a sweet, orange light. She's naked and appealing on the queen-size bed. She eyes him impatiently, flashes a lazy smile and parts her legs to afford him greater accessibility.

He approaches the foot of the bed to take her.

Lion. *LION.*

All the Poets

at the bar
he said
you're the
poet

we all
are
i
said

look around
you
they're all
writing
poems

they just
don't
know
it

Blood Lost While
Writing Poems

I pour
myself a
large
glass of
dark red
wine

to
replace
the blood
lost while
writing
poems

- adrian manning

You are sweet,
but you will never
be sweeter

than all
of his goodbyes
put together -

he is death,
he is better. EV♥

We nailed
the stars shut
into each
other's eyes -

Now the sky
is a pretty coffin. EV♥

he said
the cemetery
would be cold
without my love -
that's when
i knew the trouble
i was already in. EV♥

- eliana vanessa

The Man with the Voice

Your voice:

textural gravel
well-travelled over
until ultimately cemented
with various shades
of language
like a rock quarry
and its colorful raw edges,
pits that culminate
in jagged, life-ending valleys,
layered full of ancient accents,
flavored spices, a daunting,
gentleman-like landscape,
flying off of your tongue,
loose and on a rampage.

While on Vacation

Over-
hanging the mountain
top, the sun explodes.

Stephanie Hiteshew

versatile

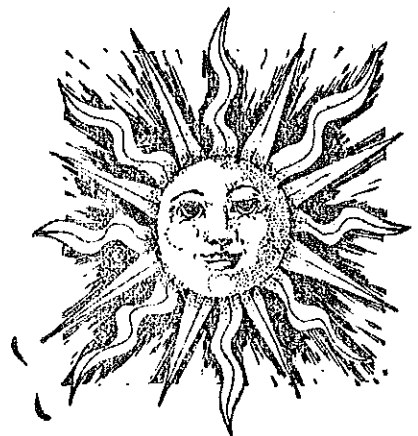
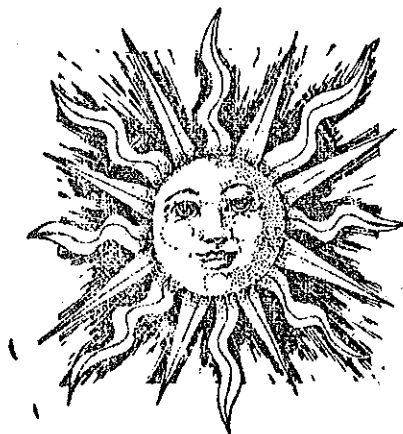
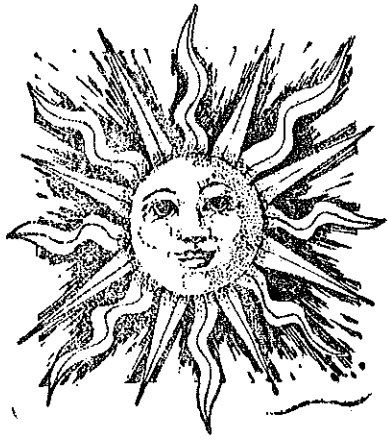
Muppet

defied convention

rapidly changing

Sultry

Millennial

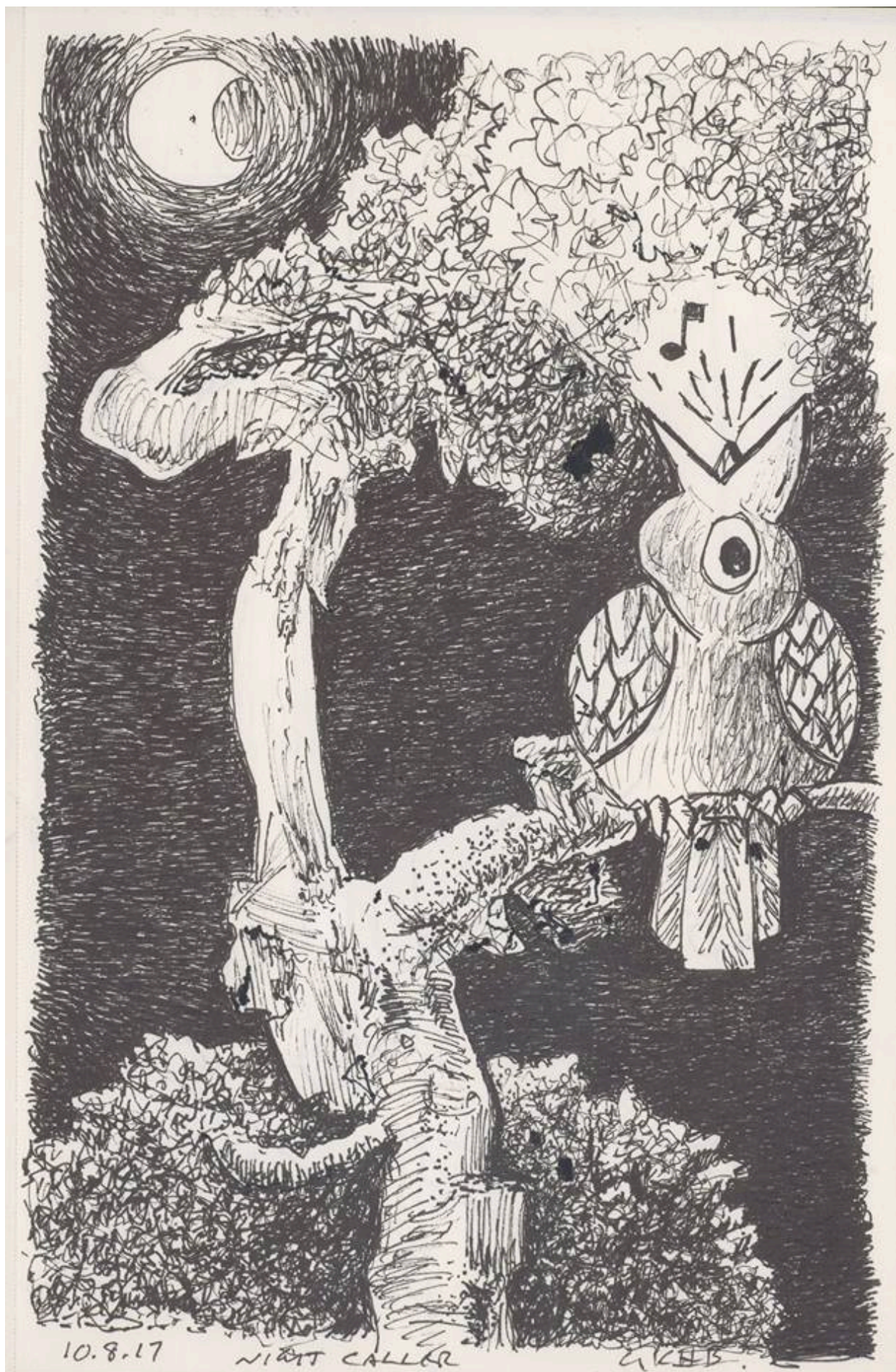




9.29.17

NIGHT CALLERS

9K#3



A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC.

Geisha moon over a crumbled chimney;
breeze bends graceful reeds
surviving in a dirt patch.
Greyscale corner of the forlorn,
barely tolerated,
invisible.

A woman in a cardboard box
gestures to the golden sphere.
Dirty hands flutter like butterflies.
She hums despair.
Abandoned, Cio Cio San
smokes her poison.

Cristina Umpfenbach-Smyth

WHERE ARE THE TRUMPETS OF JERICO?

Midday,
hot white she
mercilessly throws
scorching heat.
In a parched landscape nothing moves.
She slowly rounds the semicircle
to it's western end,
surrounds herself with glorious colors,
slips under the horizon
leaving a reddened sky.

A group of people
huddle in a ditch of burning sand,
pass a bottle, water,
barely enough to moisten parched lips.
They wait for dark.
Blunted by exhaustion,
gather what is left of hope and strength.
The dessert wakens.
A velvet sky blooms with stars.
They walk.

In sight a wall rises,
Do they near safety or death?

Cristina Umpfenbach-Smyth

ALWAYS MORE.

You always
had more answers than I had questions.
They zig zagged, dazzled, left the
question mark confused.

You always
had more needs than I had giving,
Tentacles probing my orifices,
Left me in joyless surrender.

You always
had more notes than our tune could carry.
Hanging from a broken clef
our song perished with the clap of percussion.

Cristina Umpfenbach-Smyth

AMBROSIA

I was a loner before I knew the meaning of the word,
gravitating away from rather than toward, spraying
myself with mental OFF, deflecting people when
they took the time to notice repellent was in place.
Often they assumed I'd been splattered by mistake
and made allowances I never asked for, accepting all
in spite of everything. They crowded, they consoled.
They fed my appetite for time alone. Closeness was
painful, inches of air between us bruised like pitted
cherries grabbed too quickly, too tightly –
lone peculiar bleeding into homogeneous swirl.

barbara moore

MONDAY MORNING

Early commuters pass him by.
On the corner of Austin and 68th,
he waves his arms, exhales obscenities.
The regulars no longer notice.
Only children respond to him.
Fascinated, their faces light up.
He's like a wind-up toy gone rogue,
a talking doll stuck on repeat.

barbara moore

Another Shall Be Another's (Ode to JB, courtesy of Pablo Nuerto, Poema 20)

I burn
my smoke competing
with the fog sliding
across the pasture before me
I hear the crickets sing
in the darkness
at my feet
another shall be another's
Venus shining down
through the clouds
whispering
another shall be another's
Leaves falling
from the trees
remind me
another shall be another's
It is easier
I tell myself
to pine for the unattainable
so let another be another's
I stare
at the tattoos that
cover my arms
what was once art
is now a warning:
Don't get too close!
Lest you become

blood of my blood
skin of my skin
bone of my bone.
Bare Naked Ladies
on the computer croon
"I wake up scared, I wake up strange
I wake up wondering if anything in my life is ever going to change
I wake up scared, I wake up strange
And everything around me stays the same"
So I paint. That is what I do
fast and furious.
I don't want to stop
lest sleep over come me
I need someone
I want to love,
to be loved.
I don't want to be alone.
But for now
to staunch the bleeding,
I allow myself only
what crumbs are left over.
A Buddhist, a begger
is there a difference
at this point?
My needs don't matter.
Not when another shall be another's...

andrew turman

Revelations at the Hummingbird Cottage

The dragonflies flutter in geometric patterns,
as dusk begins to settle upon the Hummingbird Cottage.

This was supposed to be a romantic vacation
yet most of my time has been spent alone.

Seated by the fire pit,
my thoughts search the flames for an explanation.

You are nothing like the person I fell in love with.

I flash a smile anyhow...

because I believe I'm having a break through –
not to be confused with a breakdown.

This is simply all you have to offer.

Initially, I thought I had finally found someone
to share the rest of my brief life with.

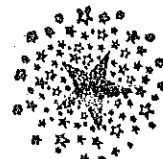
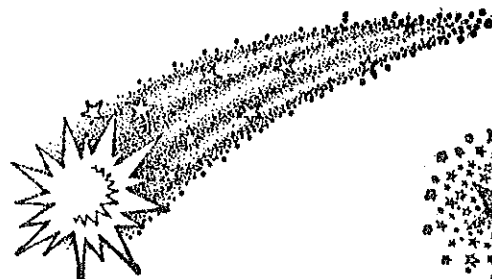
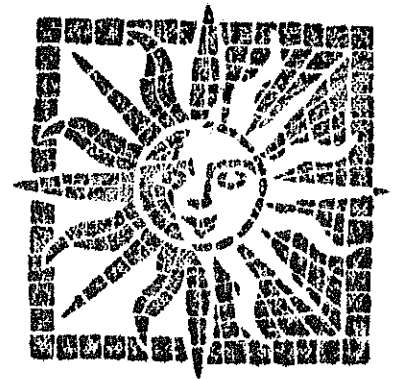
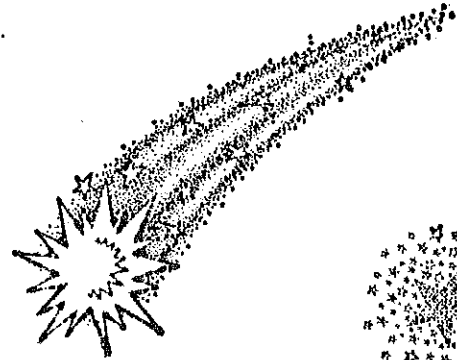
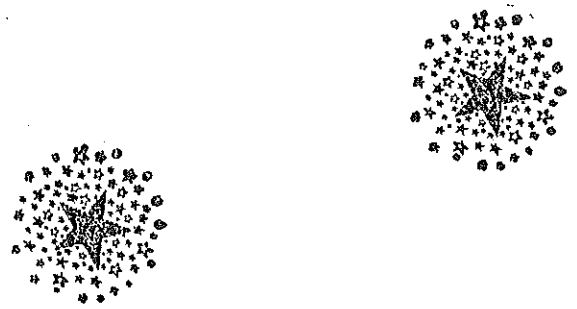
You were a God to me and I worshiped you every moment of every day.


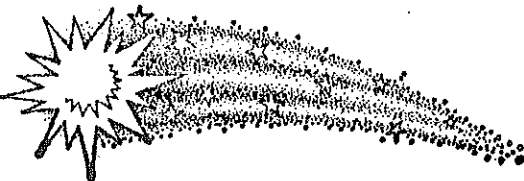
Love had become my Only religion
and I devoted myself to you so completely –
that my body dripped scriptures instead of sweat.

And yet no matter how elaborate my offerings, or how devout I became,
you made the conscious decision to just piss it all away.

I cannot and will not fight for us anymore.

I was happier on my own.

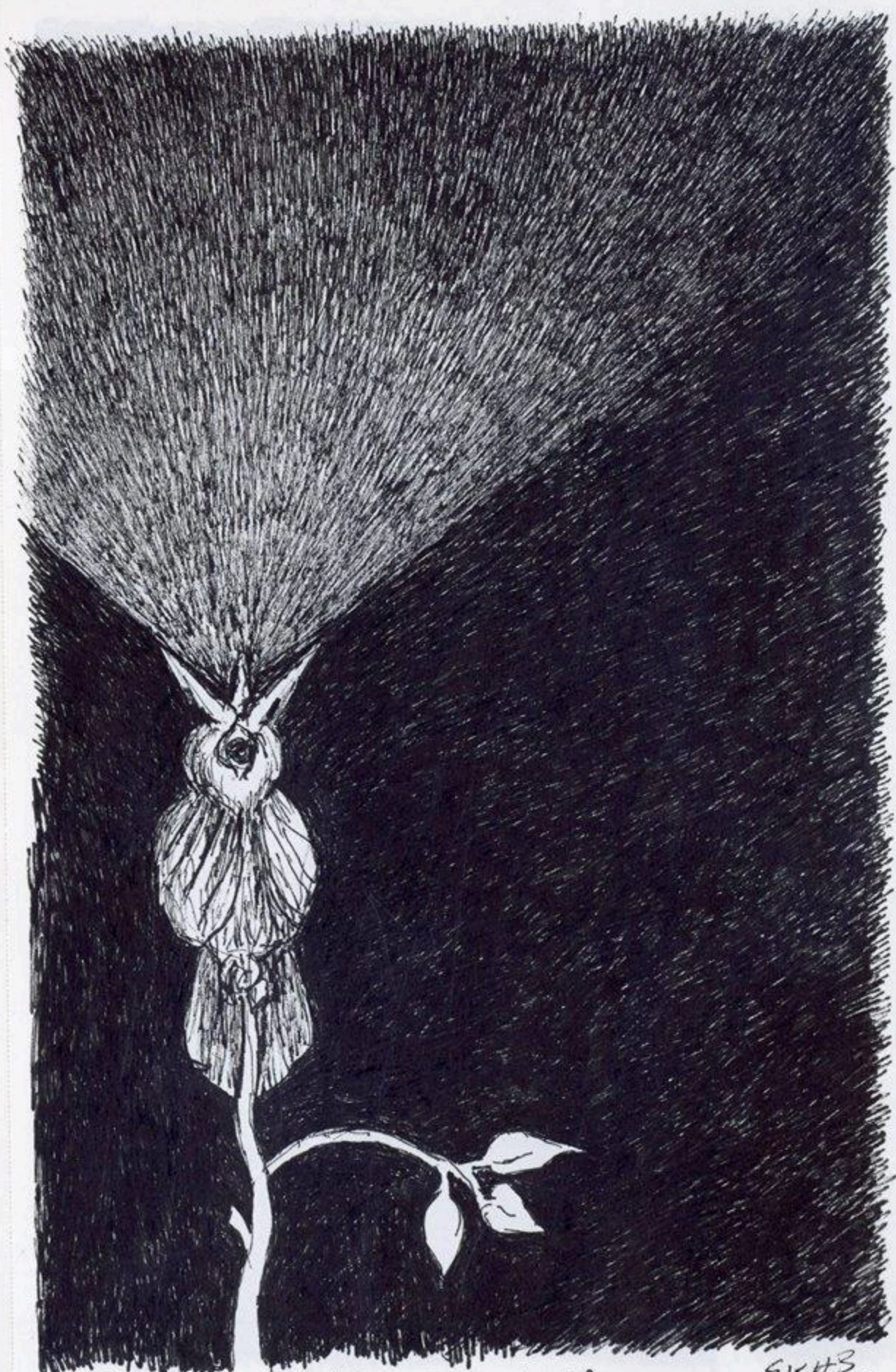




The lightening bugs have gathered
and begin their iridescent ballet.
I add more kindling to the fire,
and flash a smile anyhow...
because I believe I'm having a break through –
not to be confused with a breakdown.

Dilya K. Ravyn





10.13.17

THE NIGHT CALLER

SIXTH.

"armageddon, it's gotten.

no savior, jailer can take it from me." - patti smith, 1976.
you have the eyes of a savior,
mind gone omega.

thin shards of light surround you like the shattered
mirror at my feet.

you cannot gauge your own reflection yet you see
into my soul like some peeper gorging hot
underneath the window blind.

don't turn away just yet.
stay and draw another breath.
i may have something to confess.
- kevin m. hibshman.



proximity

i must keep my appointment w/time.
there are things to DO today.

nostalgia has cast a wicked spell
on my footsteps.

i seem to be moving backwards towards
fulfillment never achieved.

why can't you be here with me?

- kevin m. hibshman.

that certain something

how grateful i am that you continue
to see it in me.

- kevin m. hibshman.

when you love someone
as i love you,
it's the scariest
thing
in
the
world.



how do i make you
understand that
you are a
bigger part
of my world
than i am?

if i turn away,
it's only fear again.
how can i be well
if you are not?

- kevin m. hibshman

love is death. death in love?

please do not lose any more weight.

be extra careful walking to the bus stop.

eat something today and work on your painting.

please please be OK and let me not outlive you.

— kevin m. hibshman —



THE KING OF MOTHS

by C.F. Roberts

Bucky both loved and hated August.

It was Four AM and he was by the outer gates of the melt furnace area, sweeping up dross when a huge, green luna moth flew in under the big roll-down door. Bucky watched it and thought, don't. Just don't.

It did no good---it so frequently didn't. The luna moth lit on one of the slag troughs and it burst into flame almost instantly. Within seconds it was consumed.

In August this was an ongoing ritual---it had been for over ten years, ever since Bucky had started work at Stanley Widgets. Every year, it seemed, he sat there and watched them fling themselves to their deaths.

After awhile, the vigil took its toll on a guy's conscience.

It wasn't just the melt department, it was the casting deck, too. Bucky had seen it with his own eyes---moths would sometimes get caught in the casting molds and operators would find them imbedded in the hot aluminum.

Across his station the blast furnace roared and Bucky felt a shudder. The whole cruel process broke his heart every day. The moths flocked to him like children and the hell of it was they actually liked it at Stanley Widgets---hell, they liked it better than he did. The shit a guy went through for a paycheck. Watching nightly genocide notwithstanding---Rose and Billy busting his chops out on smoke break---he knew in their way they were being friendly but they made him nervous.

Bucky felt a great kinship with the moths that worshipped him---frail, combustible, naked---as though this inferno might devour him at any second.

The moths might fly to his defense at a moment's notice, of course---but the irony of it all was, of course, that they were moths. What could they do?

As he shuffled around with the broom, Bucky glanced up at the high ceiling and there they all were---following his movements in a swirling mass. They liked the light and the heat---they liked being safe from their various predators---most of all they liked being in his presence. There wasn't a lot the poor things understood, though---they understood "come", they understood "hi" and "hello"---they understood "I love you", oddly enough. They couldn't seem to wrap their little brains around "Don't go near that---it'll kill you." And so he lost more friends every night.

"C'mon, Bucky," Billy hollered, "let's wrap it up! It's about beer thirty!"

"Yeah," yelled Bucky. "Gimme a sec." It was his turn to scrape out Furnace A. He slapped on his face shield and took a furtive look upward. The mass of surging moths followed his path and he knew he'd be losing at least twenty before daybreak.

He loved them like they were his own children, but he had to allow that they weren't the brightest stars in the sky.

His heart sank as he grabbed his tools.

